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The activities of Thomas Becket

during his exile in France

History

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THE ACTIVITIES OF THOMAS BECKET DURING
HIS EXILE IN FRANCE

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BY

WILLIAM SYLVESTER ADAMS

A. B. Greenville College, 1907

THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

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IN HISTORY

IN

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

*H. S. Adams*ENTITLED *The Activities of Thomas Becket
during his Exile in France*

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I

INTRODUCTION

Without question the controversy between Henry II and Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is one of the most rancorous and famous in history. The points at issue, also, were among the most important and far-reaching which ever brought contention into Christendom. The direct results of the struggle, however, are unimportant as compared with the unceasing disquiet it produced and the wide spread attention it drew to itself.

If we should seek the causes of this quarrel we should find that they are several. The fact that we have two of the very strongest personalities, flourishing in the same generation and in the same kingdom, gives some explanation of the nature and cause of the struggle. Again, the time in which these actors who played the principal parts lived, offers conditions which account in part for the arising of this condition, but not more, perhaps not so much as the times immediately preceding.

If we should investigate the conditions in which Henry II found the realm of England, we should find it one of chaos, disorganization, anarchy, and the people exhausted from non-government and misrule. It was Henry's task to assert the powers of government and the supremacy of the law. In this, Thomas Becket, who was made his chancellor, had a large part. But Henry, seeking control of the Church of England, secured for his right hand man and leading diplomat in civil affairs, the Archbishopric of Canterbury. Instead of aiding his King in this, however,

Becket resigned the Chancellorship, turned Churchman of the most extreme type and from then on opposed Henry at every point.

In this opposition not only did he bring to play his diplomatic experience, the prestige of his high office, but in a greater measure than anything else, he exercised an unrelenting zeal, an indefatigable energy and unceasing and widespread activity which drew into the arena of the struggle nearly all the leading prelates and potentates of Europe. Thus this contest between these two obstinate personalities became an international and world wide affair.

The immediate cause of the conflict and the rock which wrecked their aforetime peace and harmony were the Constitutions of Clarendon. These were an agreement to be sworn to by the officers of the Church, which among other things compelled the clergy to receive justice in the courts of the realm, to obtain from the King an order to leave the kingdom or to make an appeal to Rome, and in fact to surrender "the rights of the order."

Becket, having insincerely agreed to these without any intention of adhering to them, or else having rashly agreed to them and afterwards repented, and decided not to stand to it, proceeded to act in direct violation ^{of} to them. For this he was summoned before a council of the estates of the realm and charged with various misdeeds and declared guilty. But Becket forbade the sentence to be pronounced, overawed the council so that the barons retired and then arose and walked out unsentenced. All his activities in open and avowed opposition to Henry were carried on and directed, from this time on, from points and places outside of England.

II

At last the quarrel that had been brewing between King Henry II and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, came to an open breach at the Council of Northampton, and Becket eluded sentence of condemnation only by withdrawing under cover of night. He had this same day sent a request to the King for a safe conduct abroad. The King replied that he would send an answer the next day. But Becket did not intend to wait for the answer. He left Northampton in the middle of the night, in torrents of rain, accompanied by three attendants, two monks and a servant. He first made his way to Lincoln where he rested a day. From here disguising himself as a monk, and assuming the name, Brother Christian,¹ he set out for the sea. From fear of being recognized he was compelled to travel by night and to conceal himself among friends during the day. At last he reached the port of Sandwich from whence, setting sail early in the morning, he made his crossing and landed the same day, November 2, in Flanders near Gravelines.¹

Without delay he proceeded towards France, still traveling secretly on account of Philip, Count of Flanders, who was closely leagued with the King, making his way to Clair-Marais near St. Omer, thence to St. Bertin's Abbey where he was heartily welcomed.

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¹ Materials, III, 70 (Stephens), 326 Bosham; Diceto, I, 314; Wendover, I, 33; Hoveden, I, 229; Materials, II, 399, (Grim); Ramsay, "Angevin Empire," 65. He is called "Brother Christian Dearman."

² Materials, III, 70 (Stephens) 328-330 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 257;

Here also he was met by Herbert of Bosham who was waiting for him with money and valuables brought from Canterbury.

The King could not but realize how formidable an ally the exile would be to his enemies so his first move was an attempt to head off the flight of the Archbishop. Having failed in this he sent messengers to preoccupy the minds of the Count of Flanders, the King of France and the pope against his fugitive subject.¹ For he reasoned that Becket would act, and be received, as an independent potentate. Henry's envoys appeared before the French King and presented him a letter urging him not to admit within his domains Thomas, the late Archbishop of Canterbury. To which the King of France replied, "Late Archbishop: and who had presumed to depose him? I am a king like my brother of England; I should not dare to depose the meanest of my clergy."² From which it may be inferred that Louis was not willing to withhold hospitality from so distinguished a potentate as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After this interview with Louis, the King's envoys went to the Pope, Alexander III, at Sens, who was in exile, also, on account of the schism in the Church.³ As to how these envoys should be received was a difficult question for the Pontiff. To Henry he was practically indebted for his elevation to office, since Henry and the King of France⁴ had recognized him as the rightful successor of St. Peter. So, now, while he was afraid of offending the rich

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¹ Materials, "Ibid", 70 (Stephens), 332-335 (Bosham).

² Materials, III, 332 (Bosham).

³"Ibid," 70 (Stephens).

⁴ Ramsay, "Angeván Empire," 67, ⁵says "Louis had shown a disposition to treat the claims as an open question."

young King who had been his staunch supporter, yet he was not willing to desert Becket, the representative of the Church and the champion of Church rights. Therefore, when the embassy came to him asking that Becket be sent back to England with a legate or legates, empowered to decide all questions between the King and the Archbishop, he parleyed for a time. He requested the envoys to wait for the coming of Becket, as he could take no action against him in his absence. They, however, were unwilling to wait and were obliged to report, on their return to Henry, an unsuccessful mission both to Louis and to the Pope.¹

While Becket was at St. Bertins, Richard de Lucy, the King's Justiciar, passed through the town. He tried to persuade the Archbishop to return to England but to no avail.² Becket was either suspicious of his friendly overtures or had resolved never again to place himself in the power of the King. As soon as "his coming was made known to his clerks, of whom he had many in Gaul, they hastened to join themselves to him. Even the Archbishop of Rheims himself, Henry, the brother of the King of France, the bishops, abbots, archdeacons, and deans of the churches recognized with due veneration so great an exile and they offered to him and to his bountifully, and compelled him to receive what was necessary for his existence."³ Thus the public opinion of Gaul seemed to be in favor of the Archbishop. In fact, so strongly was it so that the bishops, who were in the embassy sent out by King Henry,

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Materials, III, 73 (Stephens), 335-337 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 27, seq.

²

Materials, "Ibid" 71 (Stephens).

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Ibid, 72.

had to travel under assumed names, saying they were of the house of the Count of Arundell.¹

The Pope, upon hearing of the arrival of Becket in Flanders, "Condoling the exiled Archbishop with due compassion and congratulating him for fighting for the liberties of the Church, wrote to him that he should withdraw apart for the purpose of resting and taking fresh breath until he should call for him."² Becket, then, was not only supplied with everything that was necessary for his temporal needs but was shown every veneration due his high office.

As soon as Becket learned of the embassy sent out by the King of England, ^hHe sent Herbert Bosham and other clerks to spy upon them. They went to the King of France, to whom they related Thomas' troubles and were well received. The King also granted their request to harbor Becket³ within his borders. They next proceeded to Sens where they arrived a day later than the King's envoys.

A dissension arose among the Cardinals and some of them would not receive Becket's messengers with the customary kiss. They, however, related Becket's troubles, which softened the Pope's heart towards him.⁴ Becket's messengers having been present and overheard both the conference of Henry's envoys with the King of France and with the Pope, were thus enabled to return to him with

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¹ Materials, III, 72 (Stephens).

² Materials, III, 72 (Stephens).

³"Ibid," 333, (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 270.

⁴"Ibid," 335 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, 272.

good news.

Becket, being encouraged by the reports of his messengers, immediately set out for Sens. On this journey he was accompanied as far as Soissons by the Archbishop of Terouanne and the Abbot of St. Bertins. As he entered France, he was met upon approaching Soissons, by the King's brother, the Archbishop of Rheims and a long train of bishops, abbots, and other churchmen. Here also he had an interview with the King of France, who showed him great honor and favor.¹ Upon the Archbishop's arrival at Sens, the cardinals were cool in their reception of him. The Pope, however, at once granted the honor of a public audience; he placed Becket in a position of honor at his right hand and allowed him to tell the story of his troubles. Becket, after a skillful account of his hard usage, spread out the parchment containing the Constitutions of Clarendon. Upon examination the Pope pronounced his unqualified condemnation on ten of these. He rebuked Becket for his weakness in swearing to these articles, "with the severity of a father and the tenderness of a mother."² The next day, Becket pursuing his advantage, in order to get rid of certain objections which had been raised concerning his election, tendered his resignation of the Archiepiscopate to the Pope.³

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¹ Materials, III, 338, (Bosham); VI, 63, (Ammon I).

² "Ibid," III, 74 (Stephens), 342, (Bosham); VI, 63.

³ Materials, I, 46 (Wm. Cant.); Thomas Saga, I, 307-309; Morgate, "England under Angevin Kings," II, 55, says that Becket "once in an agony of selfreproach and self distrust, laid his archbiscopal ring at the Pope's feet and prayed to be released from the burden of an office for which he felt himself unworthy and unfit."

Some of the cardinals entreated the Pontiff to put an end at once to this dangerous quarrel by accepting the surrender. But the Pope and William of Pavia opposed this and restored to him the archiepiscopal ring, thus ratifying his primacy.¹ After which, Becket received the apostolic blessing and, being assured of the Pope's protection, withdrew to the abbey of Pontigny.²

As we have seen, Becket's emissaries had been present during the interview of Henry's ambassadors with the Pope. Therefore, Henry no doubt received speedy intelligence of these proceedings with Becket. The King received his embassy at Marlborough and their announcement of the proceedings at the Papal court filled him with wrath. He issued immediate orders to seize the revenues of the Archbishop and the estates of all the clergy who had followed him to France. He forbade prayers for the archbishop. The payment of Peter's Pence to the Pope was suspended. But Henry's anger was not yet satisfied. He passed a sentence of banishment upon all the Primate's kinsmen, dependents and friends and gave orders for them to be driven from the kingdom. Hundreds of persons, of both sexes and of every age, even infants were included in this relentless edict. Every adult was forced to take an oath to proceed at once to Becket in order that his misery might be the greater by seeing the miseries he had brought upon his kinsfolk and friends.³

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¹ Materials, I, 46; Thomas Saga, I, 311.

² Materials, III, 76 (Stephens), 357 (Bosham).

³ Materials, III, 75 (Stephens), 360 (Bosham); VI, (Annon I); Thomas Saga, I, 321 seq.

This order was inhumanly executed by that fierce soldier, the bitterest of Becket's personal enemies, Ranulf de Brock. The exiles were received kindly by the King of France, archbishops, bishops and abbots, and many of the monasteries and convents of Flanders and France were thrown open to them with generous hospitality.¹ Thus there was sent throughout both these countries a multitude of people appealing to the pity and the indignation of all, and so deepened the hatred towards Henry.

III

Upon leaving the Pope, Becket retired to the Cistercian abbey of Pontigny. Here he adopted the gray garb of the monks and undertook to lead a very humble life, in which he attempted to eat no food but according to the rule of the order, and gave himself up to study and devotion.² Thus did he try by strict monastic discipline to compensate for the deficiency which had been alleged on his election to the archbishopric. However, his frail body soon compelled him to give up his strict mode of living, but only after the most urgent remonstrances of his friends.³

The King, becoming impatient about the attitude of the Pope toward the trouble with Becket, sent Richard of Ilchester and John of Oxford to the Emperor, Frederick, offering to recognize the new antipope.⁴ These were kindly received and it is thought

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¹ Materials, III, 76 (Stephens).

² Materials, III, 77 (Stephens); 358 (Bosham)

³ Ibid, 377-379 (Bosham).

⁴ Materials, I, 52-53 (Wm. Cant), Thomas Saga, I, 331.

an agreement was reached. But as the Pope had been joyfully received in Rome and the Emperor was too busy with his wars north of the Alps to dislodge him, the effect of the mission was almost, if not entirely, lost.

In the meantime Becket was spending his second year in exile. Three times had he sent letters urging the King to submit to his censure. When he found that the King's heart was still hardened and that he had been communicating with schismatics, his heart burned with zeal, not, as we are assured by his followers, for vengeance but for justice. This act of the King in sending a secret messenger to the Emperor aroused him.

It was now in the second year of Becket's exile at Pontigny. The Pope had been favorably received in Rome during the preceding November. Early in Lent Henry had crossed over from England to Normandy,¹ and as Easter drew nigh, the end of the time, during which Becket, under the Pope's directions, was to take no action, also came around. After Easter day, April 24, 1166, Becket would be free to act. Moreover, in anticipation of this time, he had received from Alexander authority to take ecclesiastical action. In his letter to the Archbishop, the Pope referred to the sentence which had confiscated Becket's possessions, pronounced it "null and void; and we hereby do by our apostolic authority reverse it, and declare that it shall have no force henceforward."²

The letter would naturally have the effect of encouraging Becket and of strengthening his purpose to demand satisfaction of

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¹ Diceto, I, 318..

² Wendover, I, 39.

all his properties and revenues as a condition of peace and settlement with Henry. As to what condition the Archbishop was authorized to take we may refer to the following taken from the same letter, "For the rest, if those who have done violence or injury to you or your clerks in the possessions or goods of your Church, when legally admonished, shall fail to restore what they have taken, or to make meet satisfaction for the same, you will not hesitate at the first convenient opportunity to execute ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and whatever you shall in reason think proper to do in that behalf, we will hold good and valid. But over the person of the King we give you no specific authority, etc."¹ Thus empowered and interpreting this authority in his own way, the Archbishop prepared for immediate action. He did not delay action long enough to receive a later communication, granted on Easter Day, which gave him a Legatine Commission over all of England except the Province of York. Since Alexander III was now established in Rome, of course considerable time was required for the transmission of his communications.

Just what action Becket would have taken had he been informed of this commission, we do not try to surmise, but as it was he sent his ultimatum to King Henry, who was at that time holding councils at Chinon. This was contained in three successive letters, and seemed to carry an air of confidence, of boldness, and even of threat. Some intimation of his feelings may be given by the following lines from his letter to the King at that time.

"Hear then, if you please, my lord, the counsel of your liege,

¹ Wendover, I, 39.

the admonition of your bishop, the castigation of your father. Have no communication nor familiarity for the future with schismatics, nor enter into any contract with them. Remember the profession which you made, and placed in writing on the altar at Westminster, to preserve the Church's liberties, when you were consecrated and anointed to be King. Restore the Church of Canterbury, from which you received your promotion and consecration, to the state in which it was in the days of your predecessors. But if you will not do these things, know for a certainty that you shall feel the severity of God's vengeance."¹

This letter seemed to threaten interdict to all, even to Henry's continental possessions, and he consulted with his prelates. They decided on a counter-appeal to the Pope which would block action on the part of Becket. But the Archbishop of Rouen and the bishops sent to serve notice on Becket of this appeal could not find him for, warned of their coming, he had departed, and consequently their mission was unsuccessful. So at the feast of Ascension, at Vezelay "in the presence of all the people, who had assembled, to the festival, ascending the pulpit, he excommunicated, with the utmost solemnity all the hereditary customs of England, their observers, their defenders and abettors generally,"² and absolved all the bishops from the oaths which they had taken to maintain them. This sweeping anathema involved the whole kingdom. But he proceeded to excommunicate by name the most active and powerful adversaries; John of Oxford

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¹ Wendover, I, 42.

² Wendover, I, 40.

and Richard of Ilchester for their dealings with the schismatics; the ~~J~~udiciary, Richard de Lucy and John of Baliol as the drafters of the Constitutions of Clarendon, and others for the usurpation of the estates of Canterbury.¹

This bold act of the Archbishop, although long expected by many of the English clergy, caused great consternation. The bishops were prompt in their action. As they had "been excommunicated in their absence, without being either summoned or found guilty," they "appealed to the Pope, notifying the same to the Archbishop, and did not abstain from entering the church."² Thus the bishops in ~~order~~ not to incur the anger of the King greatly blocked the ecclesiastical censure.³

When King Henry heard of the act of excommunication given by Becket, it drove him almost to madness. He cried "the Archbishop has resolved to ruin me both soul and body"⁴ and wept for rage. He at once issued a proclamation to guard the ports of England against the interdict and to compel all adults to take an oath not to respect any ecclesiastical censure from the Archbishop. His next act was to drive Becket from Pontigny,⁵ where he had spent two years⁶ in comparative seclusion. "For," as one writer⁷

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¹ Same, *Diceto*, I, 318; *Materials* V, 383 seq.

² *Wendover*, I, 40.

³ Ramsay, "Angevin Empire," 84. "He was generally felt to have overshot the mark; and in fact his anathemas fell a dead letter."

⁴ *Materials*, II, 381, seq.

⁵ *Materials*, III, 84 (Stephens), 378 (Bosham)

⁶ *Wendover*, I, 41.

⁷ *Thomas Saga*, I, 369.

puts it, "it seemeth to the King an over measure of bliss for him to sojourn any longer at Pontigny." As soon as Becket was informed of the danger in which his stay at Pontigny was likely to involve the Cistercian order, he offered to withdraw.¹ Louis, King of France, who had been watching Henry's attitude toward Becket, hastened to Pontigny and offered him an asylum within his borders, also giving him "presents, wines and servants as many as he wished to receive."² The King's offer of an asylum was accepted. He chose Sens, and here, at the abbey of St. Columban, he was maintained by the French King for the next four years.³ Thus Henry drove his exiled Primate from his own possessions into those of his rival, the King of France, much to his own chagrin. Besides being honored by the King, Becket was received with honor and given presents by the Archbishop of Sens and the Clergy.⁴

As has been noticed above, no sooner had the sentence of excommunication been pronounced against the bishops and nobles of England than they appealed to the Pope. The King of France also wrote to the Pope but he upheld the action of Becket. Thus was the Pontiff placed between the two fires. But finally, however, with the hope of obtaining peace between the contending parties he absolved those whom the Archbishop had excommunicated.⁵ No

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¹ Materials, III, 398 (Bosham).

² "Ibid," 84 (Stephens).

³ "Ibid," III, 403 (Bosham); Wendover, I, 41; Diceto, I, 329.

⁴ Materials, III, 85 (Stephens; Thomas Saga, I, 375).

⁵ Thomas Saga, I, 419; Materials, VI, 85.

doubt he was aided in this decision through fear of an invasion from Frederick Barbarossa.

The suffragan bishops of Canterbury, fearing that Thomas would repeat his sentence against them, wrote him a letter reminding him of the kindnesses and favors of the King toward him, and telling him that they would appeal to the Pope against any sentence he should make against them. Becket recognized the Bishop of London as the author of the letter, and in his reply commanded him to restore whatever property of his church or clerks he had received by the command of the King.¹ The Bishop of London at once requested the King to find another steward for the property of Canterbury which he had in his possession.² This was just what Becket had desired. He greatly resented the action of the Pope in setting aside his sentences. The Pope, however, urged him to make all possible concessions at this perilous time of the Church.

The reason for the Pope's clemency at this time was, no doubt, that Henry II had, at the instigation of his bishops, made an appeal to Rome. Fearing that Becket would pronounce the sentence of excommunication against his own person, and lay an interdict upon his kingdom, he had in behalf of his own person and his kingdom, requested the pontiff to send envoys or legates "a latere" to England to enquire into the dispute which existed between him and the Archbishop.³ Thus we see Henry, as soon as Becket, who is within the kingdom of Louis, begins to threaten him and his kingdom, appealing to Rome. And an appeal to Rome was one of the things over which the trouble had started.

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¹ Wendover, I, 43-46.

² Materials, III, 82 (Stephens).

³ Hoveden, I, 276.

Perhaps if it had not been for the constant activity of Becket, Henry would have obtained a commission of legates "a latere" with full powers. As it was William of Pavia and Cardinal Otho were sent as mediators subject to the Pope.¹ It will be remembered that William of Pavia was the one who had urged the Pope at Sens not to accept the Archbishop's resignation. It is therefore surprising that Thomas would have believed these legates were inclined to favor the King. They summoned the King and the Archbishop to meet them near Gisors. But the demands of Becket that he and all his clerks should be replaced in possession of all that had been taken from them, the legates were neither able nor willing to grant.² The Archbishop was again restrained from uttering further sentences while negotiations were in progress, a suspension which Becket received only with mingled grief and indignation. Thus the messengers of peace returned to the Pope having gained only many rich presents from Henry. When this mission had ended in failure the Pope wrote to the King of France urging him to endeavor to bring about peace. Accordingly the next year there was a series of interviews in behalf of peace between the two Kings to which Becket was always summoned; but all these conferences were as fruitless as the former had been.³

The Pope, becoming impatient at these fruitless attempts at reconciliation, wrote a letter to King Henry, telling him that he had borne long with his persecution of Thomas and would no longer

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¹ Materials, III, 409 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 411 seq.

² Materials, III, Ibid; VI, 85 seq.

³ Thomas Saga, I, 425 seq.

restrain the Archbishop from ecclesiastical censure.¹ Therefore, another council in behalf of peace was held, in the plains near Montmarail, by legates sent out from the Pope. Here a vast assembly was convened on the day of Epiphany in the presence of the two Kings, and the barons of each realm, to witness the reconciliation. The mediators of the treaty insisted on Thomas' throwing himself on the King's mercy and without reservation. With great reluctance Becket appeared at last to yield; his counsellors acquiesced in silence. With this distinct understanding the Kings of France and England met at Montmirail, and everything seemed prepared for the settlement of the long and obstinate quarrel. As Becket advanced into the presence of the King he threw himself at his feet. Henry raised him instantly from the ground. Becket, then, began to solicit the clemency of the King. He declared his readiness to submit his whole cause to the judgment of the King and the assembled prelates and nobles. But after a pause he added, "Saving the Honor of God."²

At this unexpected turn of events, even the most ardent admirers of Becket, stood aghast. Henry reproached the Archbishop with arrogance, obstinacy and ingratitude. He offered to treat him as his predecessors had been dealt with. All present recognized the fairness of the terms and urged him to accept, but he firmly refused. Even the King of France seemed shocked at the conduct of Becket. One of his earls advised that Becket be driven out of

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¹ Diceto, I, 332.

² Materials, III, 98 (Stephens); 418 seq. (Bosham); Diceto, I, 335. Ramsay, "Angevin Empire," 113, "The formula 'saving the honor of God' had acquired a technical force, equivalent to 'the liberty of the Church.'"

France. The prelates and nobles, having labored in vain to break the spirit of the Primate, retired in sullen dissatisfaction.¹

Henry retired from the council followed by the legates. The King of France went to Montm~~or~~ail whither he was followed by Becket. King Louis managed for a time to keep himself estranged from the Archbishop, until Becket's friends began to despair of the future.² But before many days, some acts of barbarous cruelty committed by Henry destroyed the peace between the two nations and they were again in hostility. The King of France and his prelates feeling how nearly they had lost their powerful ally, began to admire what they called Becket's magnanimity as loudly as they had censured his obstinacy. The King even wrote to the Pope in behalf of the Archbishop.³

The King of England, hearing the Archbishop and Louis had come to terms, wrote to the French King strongly urging him to abandon Becket. To which he answered that "the oftener he was called upon to abandon the Archbishop so much the stronger he would defend him." The Pope also about this time sent messengers to remonstrate with King Henry about his attitude towards the Primate.⁴ Their mission apparently accomplished nothing, and they returned to the Pope.

The Archbishop being once more restored to the friendship of the French King and prelates, was encouraged to apply his spiritual

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¹ Materials, III, 427 seq. (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 431-443.

² "Ibid," III, 437 seq.; Saga, 435-437.

³ Materials, III, 439 (Bosham).

⁴ Materials, III, 440 seq. (Bosham); Saga, I, 441-445.

weapons. He once again excommunicated Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of London, Richard de Lucy, and some other counselors of the King. An emissary of Becket sent to carry the news, had the boldness to enter St. Paul's Cathedral in London, and proclaim Gilbert, Bishop of London, excommunicated.¹

Henry was not without fear at this last desperate blow. He had not a single chaplain who had not been excommunicated or was not under some ban for holding intercourse with persons under excommunication. Therefore Foliot immediately summoned his Clergy; explained the illegality and injustice of the excommunication, and renewed his appeal. On his way to Rome, Gilbert stopped in Normandy to explain the cause of his appeal and to consult with the King.² They decided to send a letter threatening to withdraw their obedience from the Pope unless he used his influence in quelling the pride of the Archbishop, and requesting that the Archbishop of York be made "legate." The Pope, although he was no longer dependent upon Henry, granted this request. But at the same time he wrote Becket that the Archbishop of York should never become legate without his consent. He also determined to appoint a new legatine commission, no longer one of avowed partisans of Henry, but disposed to high ecclesiastical views. Therefore Thomas was restrained from issuing any edict against the King or his kingdom until after Lent, unless the King should refuse to restore the property of Canterbury.³

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¹ Materials, III, 89 (Stephens).

² Diceto, I, 333.

³ Wendover, I, 59-60; Paris, I, 348-350.

The peace negotiations that were thus inaugurated were carried on under the direction of two legates, Vivian and Gratian. The first interview accomplished little, Gratian apparently thinking that nothing would come of their mission returned to Rome.¹ Vivian started to England to absolve those under sentence but before he had gone far the King of France endeavored once more to bring about peace,² and he was recalled. The council for the establishment of peace was held at Montmartre. They discussed freely the confiscation of the property of Canterbury, and Henry declared it his good will that Becket return to England in peace. Everything appeared as though the long looked for peace was about to be accomplished, until Becket demanded the kiss of peace without which he considered there would be no peace. Henry offered various excuses, lateness of the hour, the long ride before him and finally refusing, rode away with angry reproaches to Becket. The Archbishop, it seems, expected to be able to dictate his own terms of peace. Henry was just as determined to have his way. The Pope was not yet disposed to depart from the temporizing policy. So he wrote to the archbishop of Rouen and the Bishop of Nevers to make one more effort for the termination of the difficulties. He also authorized them to threaten the King with the interdict unless he made peace with Becket.⁴

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¹ Materials, III, 444 (Bosham)

² Thomas Saga, I, 447.

³ Materials, III, 97 (Stephens); 446-450 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 447-449; Diceto, I, 335-337.

⁴ Thomas Saga, I, 457.

The King was urged to abolish in due time the impious and obnoxious customs. And these bishops were intrusted with authority to absolve the refractory Bishop of London.¹ The absolving of Gilbert, by the Archbishop of Rouen, was an astounding blow to Becket. He tried to call in question the authority of the Archbishop to pronounce it without the presence of his colleague. The Archbishop disregarded his remonstrances, and thus Becket's sentence was annulled by the authority of the Pope.

Becket was to receive yet another blow. The King had learned by the experience of his mother how insecure the English crown was, and so had determined to have his eldest son crowned in his presence. When the rumor reached the ears of the Pope he protested. Becket threatened them with the interdict but all to no avail. The Archbishop of York won over the English Clergy, who were to assist him, by displaying a papal brief, authorizing him to perform the ceremony.² This Henry had wrung from the Pope three years before and had held in reserve to abide his own time. However, the Pope sent another letter to England which forbade the bishops to crown the Prince. This letter was finally forced upon the Archbishop of York the evening before the coronation. Nevertheless the ceremony took place the next day, July 24, 1170, at Westminster in the presence of the King and his nobles. In this ceremony the Archbishop of York was assisted by the Bishops of London, Rochester, Durham, and Salisbury.³

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¹ Diceto, I, 338.

² Materials, VI, 206-207, Ramsay, "Angevin Empire, 116, note 7:

³ Materials, III, 458 (Bosham); Hoveden, II, 4-5; Wendover, I, 78; Thomas Saga, I, 452.

When the news of the coronation of the young Prince reached the continent, Becket was incensed, and the Pope seemed displeased. The legates were urged to action, requested to threaten the King with the interdict and to censure the bishops concerned in the coronation. Becket complained to the Pope, who replied that he had excommunicated the Bishops of London and Salisbury.¹

Henry was obliged immediately after the crowning of his son, to rush back to Normandy to make peace with the King of France who was aroused because his daughter had not been crowned along with her husband, the Prince Henry. About this time some one suggested to Henry that the Archbishop would be less dangerous within his kingdom than without.² The hint appealed to Henry at once. The two Kings had held a conference at Fretteville between Chartres and Tours.³ The Archbishop of Sens prevailed upon Becket to be in the neighborhood. Some days after the King seemed to have been persuaded by the legates to hold a conference with Becket. As soon as they drew near, the King rode up to the Primate and saluted him with frank courtesy. After a short conversation in the presence of the bishops, the King withdrew apart with Becket.⁴

The interview was long enough to try the patience of the spectators, and so familiar that it might seem there had never been

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¹ Materials, III, 462-3 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 445-59.

² Materials, III, 106-107 (Stephens).

³ Wendover, I, 79.

⁴ Diceto, I, 338-9; Wendover, I, 79.

any discord between them. Becket seemed to lay the King's faults entirely upon his evil counselors. He dwelt long upon the usurpation of the rights of the Primacy, in the coronation of the King's son. Henry held that the state of the kingdom had made it a necessity; but as his son's queen, the daughter of the King of France, was also to be crowned, he promised Becket that this ceremony should be performed by him and his son should again receive the crown from the hands of the Primate. At the close of the interview Becket sprung from his horse and threw himself at the feet of the King. The King leaped down, and holding his stirrup compelled the Archbishop to mount his horse again. In the most friendly terms he expressed his full reconciliation not only to the Archbishop but to the wondering and delighted multitude.¹

That he was sincere and had made peace in good faith we may infer from the following letter written to his son, the young King Henry. "This is to inform you that Thomas, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has made peace with me to my satisfaction. I therefore command that he and all his adherents shall be unmolested; and that you cause all their goods to be restored to him as well as to all his clerks and others who left England on his behalf, as they held them three months before the Archbishop left England. You will also summon before you some of the oldest and best Knights of the honor of Saltwood and ascertain by their oaths what property is held there of the See of Canterbury and whatsoever is found to be so shall be held by that tenure."² Peace, then,

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¹ Materials, III, 107-11 (Stephens), 446 (Bosham); Diceto, I, 338-339.

² Materials, III, 112 (Stephens); Wendover, I, 79.

was made without any act of submission on the part of either of the contestants.¹ They had carefully avoided any mention of the hated constitutions. Henry had not recalled them. They were still the law. Becket had not sworn to observe them and doubtless had no intention of so doing.

The King desired that Becket should return at once to England with him. The Archbishop did not, however, care to accept the King's offer, perhaps desiring to test further the King's peace. He gave as an excuse farewell visits to his friends in France.² This delay was used to obtain letters of excommunication from the Pope. For Becket had no intention of submitting peacefully or of overlooking the offence in the coronation of the young King. During this time that the Archbishop was preparing to return to England, the King and Thomas held another conference at Tours. Here the Archbishop again attempted to obtain the kiss of peace, which he considered essential to the reconciliation. And again the king as skillfully avoided it.³ The circumstances were these. It was supposed that Becket was determined to secure the kiss of peace, if even by ruse, and for that purpose appeared at the King's early Mass where he would have the opportunity of offering the King a kiss that could not be evaded. But the King was forewarned and ordered the celebration of Mass for the dead in which the kiss would not be given.

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¹ Norgate, II, 73, "Peace was made on terms which practically amounted to a complete mutual amnesty and a return to the state of affairs which existed before the quarrel."

² Thomas Saga, I, 463.

³ Materials, III, 469 (Bosham); Saga, I, 469.

John of Oxford was commissioned by the King to accompany the Archbishop and reinstate him in his See.¹ The news of Becket's return preceded him, and was received with great joy among the poor people to whom he had always been a friend. He also sent letters to the senior canon of Canterbury, to absolve all those who had communed with the schismatics or excommunicates.² This was done, no doubt, in order to assure him a warm reception to his See. But the fear that he should come prepared to utter sentences against his foes had caused all the ports of England to be guarded.

Becket being warned of this, sent these letters from the Pope, for which he had been waiting and which he had now received, on before him.³ A strange coincidence is that the very men upon whom these letters brought sentence, Roger of York, Gilbert Foliot, and Joscelin of Sarum were at Dover in charge of the efforts to prevent the landing of the papal letters. It was probably because the bearer of these letters was a lad or acolyte that he escaped suspicion.⁴

These letters, having evaded the guards of the English ports, were in due time published, resulting in the suspension of the bishops who had taken part in the coronation of the King's son.⁵

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¹ Materials, III, 116 (Stephens).

² Thomas Saga, I, 483.

³ Materials, III, 472 (Bosham).

⁴ Materials, I, 87, 89, 95 (Wm. Cant), III, 471-472.

⁵ Ibid, 177 (Stephens); Thomas Saga, I, 483.

A great commotion was caused by this act of the Archbishop. The opposition to his return which was headed by Ranulf de Brock, was greatly increased. Brock with a body of knights met the Primate when he landed, apparently Thursday, December 1,¹ in England and urged him to absolve the bishops. But Becket refused to listen to them until he should come to Canterbury. The knights were only restrained from violence by being warned by John of Oxford, who vouched for Becket's authority for landing.²

Although greatly angered at the ill success of their interview they were forced to postpone further action until the Primate was reinstated in Canterbury. The Archbishop's entrance to Canterbury³ was one of great state and worthy of his office. However, those who did homage were in the main lower clergy and poor people as all those who should have been present were disqualified on account of the sentence of excommunication.

No sooner had he been reinstated in his See than his enemies returned to him, this time bearing letters from the bishops praying for absolution. The request for absolution being again denied by Becket, Roger, Archbishop of York, persuaded the other bishops to resist the Primate and appeal to the power of the King.⁴

In the meantime Becket sent envoys to the young King to assure him that his action toward the bishops involved no ill will

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¹ Diceto, I, 339; Materials, I, 99.

² Ibid, 477 (Bosham)

³ Materials, III, 478-479 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, I, 493.

⁴ Ibid, 480-481 (Bosham); Saga, 497-501.

toward him. This embassy proving fruitless, the Primate started to journey across the kingdom to pay a visit in person to the young King. However, he had gone no farther than London when he received a mandate from the King forbidding him to travel through the kingdom and ordering him to return to Canterbury, much to the exultation of his enemies especially the Brocks.¹

The Archbishop, far from submitting peacefully to the King's order, again had recourse to the spiritual weapon. On Christmas day he preached a sermon in which he censured his enemies and ended by excommunicating Ranulf, Robert Brock and others.² At the same time the bishops, who had gone to appeal to the King, were spending Christmas with him in Normandy and made their complaints against Becket. As usual under such circumstances, Henry gave way to one of his ungovernable fits of anger and exclaimed: "Have I no one of my thankless and cowardly courtiers who will relieve me of the insults of one low born and troublesome priest."³ The King's words were interpreted to mean that he desired some one to rid him of the troublesome Archbishop. And accordingly four knights, Reginald Fitz Urse, William de Tracy, Hugh de Moreville, and Reginald Brito, entered into a conspiracy to murder Becket. They left the King's court and set out for England.⁴

Upon landing in England they held a council at Saltwood Castle,

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¹ Materials, III, 481-82 (Bosham); Thomas Saga, 505; Paris, I, 362.

² Materials, III, 130 (Stephens), 484 (Bosham).

³ Materials, II, 429 (Grim); 69 (Anon.).

⁴ Ibid, III, 128 (Stephens); 487 (Bosham).

where they were joined by Brocks.¹ The next day, December 29, the conspirators with a party of supporters rode to Canterbury. Leaving the company of followers to keep watch, the four knights with only a few attendants entered the cathedral grounds.² They at once asked to see the Archbishop. Upon being admitted into the presence of the Primate, Fitz Urse, taking the lead, declared they had come in the name of the King to summon him before his Majesty for his conduct in violating the recent peace, by suspending the prelates who had crowned the young King; and by excommunicating the King's ministers and advisers.²

Becket strongly defended his conduct and spurning the advice of his followers, to submit to the cause of the King, he declared his intention of remaining at Canterbury, from whence, in fact, he had been forbidden by the King to leave. Being unable to frighten the Archbishop into submission, the conspirators then withdrew to arm themselves and make all safe for the prosecution of their work. They made their preparations and secured the gates, leaving them guarded in order that they might not be interrupted from without. With robes off and swords girded on, the knights returning found the hall closed to them. But Robert of Brock, being acquainted with the premises, led them to an external staircase leading up to a side door. Ascending this, they broke through the door, thus gaining an entrance.³

Becket had remained deaf to all entreaties to flee until the

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¹ Materials, III, 130 (Stephens); Thomas Saga, I, 517.

² Materials, III, 132 seq.

³ Materials, III, 132-137 (Stephens).

sound of breaking wood-work and flying footsteps reached his ears. Then only was he prevailed upon to enter the church, where vespers had begun, by an unfrequented passage way. This, however, he refused to allow his attendants to lock.¹ He did not wish the house of prayer to be turned into a fortress.

Scarcely had he entered the church when the knights, armed with swords and battle axes, rushed in crying, "Where is that traitor Thomas Becket? Where is the Archbishop? Proudly repelling the taunt, as was becoming of him, he turned upon the armed knights. "Here am I, no traitor, but a priest of the Lord."² Once more the conspirators made their demand that the Primate should withdraw his sentences, absolve the excommunicates, and restore the bishops to their offices. The Archbishop again refused. Whereupon he was promptly attacked by the knights, Fitz Urse striking the first blow. Edward Grim, one of Becket's biographers, in attempting to ward off the blow was wounded on the arm.³ This murder was one of the most brutal ever committed. The deed was accomplished, the murderers plundered the archiepiscopal palace, carried off everything of value and turned the whole household out of doors.⁴

The news of the murder of the Archbishop spread rapidly. As was quite natural, it was first considered to have ^{been} done by the

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¹ Materials, III, 132-137 (Stephens).

² Ibid, 140 (Stephens).

³ Materials, I, 134 (Cant.); 498 (Bosham); Paris, I, 363-4.

⁴ Materials, III, 144 (Stephens), 513 (Bosham).

direct order of the King. Feeling against Henry ran high. He shut himself up for days and would see no one.¹ As was also to be expected the Archbishop of Rotrou, who had been a friend of Becket, laid Henry's continental possessions under the interdict. The Norman clergy refused to obey and the result was that after the usual papal threats and diplomatic parleying, Henry was reconciled with the Church.

VI

As for Becket we can but admire his courage, constancy and independence. He was imbued with the papal ideas of his times and would gladly have reduced England to absolute submission to the Church. His fight was for a spiritual cause and, as he no doubt supposed, with spiritual weapons. His training, however, had been, by his career of chancellor for Henry, entirely secular. Accordingly in this fight for a spiritual cause, his conduct was thoroughly secular and political. He was a politician and fought had it not been for his tragic death, as a politician, and such would have been the universal verdict. The ascendency of the Clergy in matters temporal was the end for which he strove. For the cause in which he fought and fell he was a willing martyr but no true saint.

His opportunities while in exile, for peace and a safe return to England, on reasonable terms were many. But his spirit was obstinate, his purpose unyielding, and the result was a long series of acts and counter-acts. His impassioned pleas and

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¹ Materials, VII, 438.

unceasing activity kept centered upon his cause the attention not only of King Henry and the Pope, but also that of all the leading princes and prelates. He had not the patience of Alexander III and used not his sagacity, but by unreasonable and unseasonable acts he aided in defeating his own cause and brought confusion into the Church and among the prelates of the realm. His idea of right was nothing short of victory for himself on every point, and the only means capable of bringing to an end his disturbing activities and of conquering his obstinate spirit was his death, sad and tragic tho it was.

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VII

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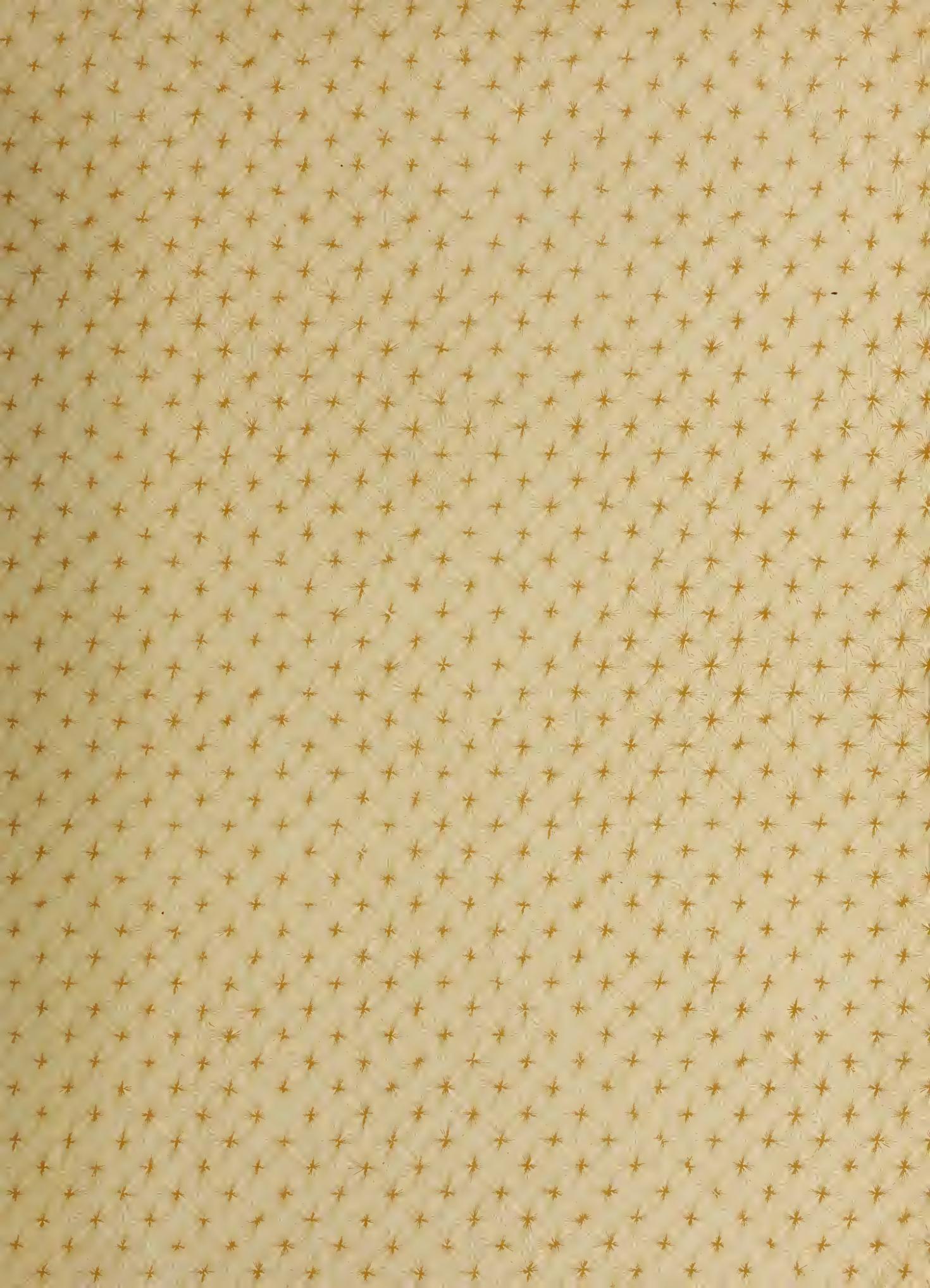
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